

Development Services



Department Description

The Development Services Department (DSD) provides review, permitting, inspection, and code enforcement services for building and development projects throughout the City of San Diego. The major functions of Entitlements, Building, Construction and Safety, and Neighborhood Code Enforcement are organized to efficiently manage a development process for the complete life cycle of a development.

The Department's mission is:

To provide effective, safe, and quality development, enhancing San Diegans' quality of life, through community, customer service, and timely and effective management of development and compliance processes

Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives represent the action plan for the Department.

Goal 1: Protect the public's health, safety and welfare

The purpose of any development regulation is to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public. The Department strives to assure that this is the primary focus of all its activities. The Department will move toward accomplishing this goal by focusing on the following objectives.

- Implement and enforce established policies, regulations, standards, and codes
- Provide regulation reviews

Goal 2: Provide quality services at a reasonable cost

The Department strives to provide the most value to its customers for the services provided, as well as to minimize the cost of the regulatory process of development in time and actual costs. The Department will move toward accomplishing this goal by focusing on the following objectives.

- Continually review services to ensure that they are in line with expectations
- Train staff to provide outstanding service delivery
- Utilize efficient and effective processes in the delivery of services
- Develop strategies to appropriately size the Department's resources to workload/demand fluctuations

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Goal 3: Develop and support the workforce

As a public service organization, the Department's most important resources are the knowledge and skill of our staff. The development regulation process is extremely complex and technical, thereby requiring specialized knowledge. Maintaining a highly trained workforce is critical to providing high levels of customer service. The Department will move toward accomplishing this goal by focusing on the following objectives.

- Provide a comfortable and productive office environment
- Ensure personnel remain current in their disciplines
- Ensure the safety of the workforce as they perform their duties
- Stabilize staffing levels and reduce turnover

Goal 4: Serve the City by balancing the diverse desires and needs of its stakeholder groups

Development regulations are designed to balance the needs of the community with the rights of the individual. The Department has a very wide range of stakeholders whose needs and desires constantly change. Staying in tune with these changes and balancing them is a never-ending challenge. The Department will move toward accomplishing this goal by focusing on the following objectives.

- Enforce regulations/ensure compliance
- Provide excellent customer service
- Remain sensitive and responsive to public interest
- Identify solutions that holistically support the City's long-term interests, thereby ensuring that any future implications of development (e.g., maintenance) are appropriately considered
- Continually update regulations and processes to align with the City's overall goals

Goal 5: Ensure the financial health of the Department

Workload, technology, and costs can change rapidly due to the development industry's ties to economic trends. The Department needs to be able to manage costs and maintain adequate reserves to respond to these changes. The Department will move toward accomplishing this goal by focusing on the following objectives.

- Utilize efficient and effective processes in the delivery of services
- Associate resources requested and received with the workload to assure full cost recovery and the maintenance of adequate reserves

Service Efforts and Accomplishments

2007 San Diego Fire Storm

In October 2007, San Diego experienced a major fire emergency. As a result of the fires, 362 homes were damaged or destroyed. The Department immediately deployed staff to establish a remote information and permit processing site at the Local Assistance Center in Rancho Bernardo. As of February 17, 2008, the Development Services Department has provided building records to 201 owners, issued 141 demolition permits, 44 small repair permits, and 36 electrical permits. In addition, 62 projects for new home construction or major repairs have been submitted for review to Development Services.

Customer Service Improvements

DSD's strong department-wide focus on customer service in the last three years has been a major contributor to the increase in customer satisfaction. It is also a reason that other departments have turned to DSD as a model for their customer service programs. The 2007 external True North Customer Satisfaction Survey results indicate that DSD is performing very well in what are often difficult circumstances. More than three-quarters of ministerial customers and two-thirds of discretionary customers indicated that they were generally satisfied with the Department's performance in meeting their needs on their most recent projects.

Moreover, most customers perceived that the Department has improved its customer service in the past year. Most were pleased with the Department's efforts to communicate and make information available to customers and indicated that the Department does an adequate job balancing the interests of developers with the interests of the communities that will be affected by a project. The Department improved customer service through the utilization of a customer service manager, ombudsperson, and small business liaison who all work directly and proactively with customers and the community to improve service and resolve outstanding issues.

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Outreach via the Internet

The Department's web page is continually updated. New sections in Fiscal Year 2008 included an Extensive Customer Service section that promotes ombudsman and conflict resolution services, as well as extensive informational sections on hot topics including FAA requirements, mini-dorms, and updates to the Land Development Code. More than 500 updates and additions were made to DSD's web page in the past year. The Department successfully used web noticing and email for public input and several Land Development Code Amendments this year.

Affordable In-fill Housing Expedite Program

The Affordable/In-Fill Housing and Sustainable Buildings Expedite Program was created as part of a City-wide comprehensive collaborative effort to help produce more affordable housing and sustainable buildings in the shortest time possible. Since its inception in August 2003, a total of over 170 projects have elected to utilize the Expedite Program, producing a total of over 2,000 affordable housing units and 1,000 sustainable housing units. The Expedite Program is processing discretionary permits approximately twice as fast as the Department's standard permit process.

Unreinforced Masonry (URM) Building Compliance Program

This program protects homes and businesses in San Diego by assisting property owners in complying with laws for earthquake safety. The goal of the City of San Diego's URM Ordinance is to save lives by minimizing the possibility of potential collapse of URM buildings during an earthquake. Following the original January 1, 2006 deadline for compliance, 858 buildings in San Diego remained in violation. DSD has worked closely with these property owners to bring them into compliance with the mandatory provisions of the City of San Diego URM Regulations. Additional seismic strengthening is often required based upon triggering mechanisms associated with remodeling, renovation, or change of occupancy. To date, more than 75 percent of these buildings have been brought into compliance. Approximately 205 buildings remain on the list and DSD is working aggressively to complete compliance with the ordinance.

Storm Water

By working with the Storm Water Department to enforce the provisions of the City's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit, the Department added functionality to its Project Tracking System to automatically track and schedule compliance inspections of private development during construction. This simplified the Department's process for generating mandatory storm water best management practices inspections and made mandatory reporting requirements to the Regional Water Quality Control Board more efficient.

Process Improvements

The Department has an ongoing program of process improvement that includes participation in the City-wide Business Process Reengineering effort. Some of the results of this program are listed below.

- **Noticing/hearing support automation**

DSD upgraded to an Electronic Noticing and Document Distribution process. This major overhaul for project notices, hearing dockets and minutes, project reports, environmental appeals, and environmental documents allows staff to maintain service levels with reduced staff. In FY2007, the Department processed more than 203,000 notices for nearly 800 projects, distributed approximately 2,500 copies of environmental documents, and docketed more than 450 projects for more than 75 hearings with one-third less staff than in prior years.

- **Hand-held computers for inspectors**

A pilot program implementing the use of hand-held computers has allowed inspectors to enter inspection results in real time while still in the field. The hand-held computers also function as phones and digital cameras and provide access to email and the Department's Project Tracking System, to which the inspection results are added dynamically. Inspectors are able to produce an inspection run sheet and schedule future inspections while in the field with the customer, providing much more efficient and timely service. The program is being deployed to the rest of the inspection staff and will allow immediate online access to results for customers. The Department is working with the Engineering & Capital Projects Department inspectors to allow access to inspection results for grading and public improvements through the Project Tracking System.

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▪ Pilot program underway for Electronic Plan Review

This service allows design professionals to transmit plans to the Development Services Department in an electronic format and allows staff to review plans electronically. It provides plan processing efficiencies and gives customers a choice in the way they submit their plans.

Budget Dollars at Work: Performance Expectations

Goal 1: Protect the public's health, safety and welfare

Performance Measure	Baseline FY2007	Actual FY2008	Target FY2009
1. Customer satisfaction rating on the mapping and construction permit process	76%	84%	80% respond as satisfied or better
2. Customer satisfaction rating on the discretionary entitlement (public hearing decision) process	70%	81%	80% respond as satisfied or better

Goal 2: Provide quality services at a reasonable cost

Performance Measure	Baseline FY2007	Actual FY2008	Target FY2009
1. Percent of plan reviews completed in two cycles or fewer	73%	70%	80%
2. Percent of plan reviews achieved within stakeholder group-established turnaround times	91%	87% ¹	80%
3. Percent of development inspections completed within next working day of request	98%	98%	90%

Goal 3: Develop and support the workforce

Performance Measure	Baseline FY2007	Actual FY2008	Target FY2009
1. Percent of supervisors attending formalized City supervisor training within one year of being selected to supervise	68%	86%	85%

Goal 4: Serve the City by balancing the diverse desires and needs of its stakeholder groups

Performance Measure	Baseline FY2007	Actual FY2008	Target FY2009
1. Percent of Code Violation cases investigated within 180 days			
▪ Building/Housing/Noise	90%	N/A ²	90%
▪ Land Development/Zoning	80%	N/A ²	90%
2. Customers surveyed rating DSD services as satisfactory or higher			
▪ Ministerial Reviews	76%	81% ³	80%
▪ Discretionary Reviews	70%	72% ⁴	80%

¹ Turnaround times vary based on project type, size, and complexity. Established ranges are from 1-45 business days per review cycle. Typical turnaround time goals are 21 business days for first review cycle and 14 days for subsequent review of submitted projects.

² Statistics for these measures are still being compiled and were unavailable at the time of printing. Statistics related to this measure are expected to be available in October 2008.

³ Includes building permit, grading permit, public right-of-way permit, and other construction-level permit reviews. This is a staff-level review for compliance with regulations, no public review or public hearings are involved.

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Goal 5: Ensure the financial health of the Department

Performance Measure	Baseline FY2007	Actual FY2008	Target FY2009
1. Level of fund reserves (in order to achieve City policy targets for fund reserves)	1% of projected annual expenses	-5.09% ⁵	2-7% of projected annual expenses

Budget Dollars at Work: Sizing and Workload Data

	Actual FY2005	Actual FY2006	Actual FY2007	Actual FY2008	Target FY2009
Workload Data					
Number of plan checks performed	70,034	75,906	67,348	64,655	64,655
Valuation of building permits permitted	\$1.96B	\$1.96B	\$1.49B	\$1.43B	\$1.43B
Building permits issued	10,675	10,203	8,568	8,225	8,225
Valuation of public improvements and grading permitted	\$177.1M	\$176.4M	\$178.8M	\$171.6M	\$171.6M
Number of inspections performed	142,896	157,535	150,127	144,120	144,120
Number of discretionary project applications	952	775	512	350	350
Number of code compliance cases investigated	7,289	7,152	6,091	7,200	7,200

⁴ Includes community plan amendments, rezoning actions, development permits, conditional use permits, and other conceptual reviews. Public notice and review is involved, decisions are subject to California Environmental Quality Act, and most decisions involve public hearings with the ability to appeal the initial decision.

⁵ Due to the increases in employee's fringe rates and the downturn of the economy, DSD has had to fund their operations from their reserve funds. DSD is currently studying their fees and will come forward to Council in Fiscal Year 2009 for a fee adjustment.